

**Rex Scouten's Testimony on**  
**Government Island**

February 7, 2002

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I would like to give some history of Government Island stone at the White House as well as my personal experiences.

Over the years many have considered the sandstone from the Aquia area to be an inferior building material. However, Government Island stone has served the White House well for over 200 years and I believe with proper care and maintenance will continue to serve for many, many years in the future.

Construction of the White House walls was completed in 1798. In 1814 a fire set by British Armed Forces destroyed the roof and house interior, only the four exterior sandstone walls remained.

In the late 1940's a structural survey teams recommended that the White House undergo a complete structural renovation even suggesting that the original exterior walls should be destroyed and that a more "durable" material be selected. There were many who agreed with the recommendation, however, President Harry Truman did not.

All Americans owe a debt of gratitude to President Truman who said that he would not consider destroying the walls or any other original material that could possibly be reused.

During the late 1970's it was noted that the paint on the exterior walls was not adhering properly some felt it was the fault of the Government Island sandstone. Therefore, with President Jimmy Carter's approval, a project to remove all of the paint from the exterior walls-for the first time in the history of the House. The walls had been given a coat of white wash in 1789 and had been repainted off and on during the next 100 years. Then for many years it had been painted each Presidential election year.

The paint removal project identified forty-three coats of paint. The coats represented many different formulas some of which were not compatible with the others. During the project the expertise of a paint manufacturer and the National Bureau of Standards were called to develop a paint formula specifically for sandstone. The sandstone paint that was developed requires repainting every eight years rather than each four years. This resulted in a substantial savings as well as less inconvenience to the First Family.

When the paint had been completely removed from the walls relatively little stone deterioration was detected. A great deal of damage was the result of poor stone repair procedures that actually caused far more damage than good.

Government Island sandstone has proven to be an excellent choice for the construction of the White House-a stone that was recommended by President George Washington.

I deeply appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee and to urge support of House Resolution 261.

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